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ABSTRACT

This report examines the problem of strained relations between State universities and the State government and addresses why this condition might exist for many schools of higher education. It suggests that the proper role of the campus Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in improving state relations, and in all other institutional relations, is as educational leader. The importance of such leadership has grown even more pressing in recent years because of the many grievances that have been filed against higher education, such as science and athletic scandals; low graduation rates; sexual, drug, and alcohol abuse; and the misuse of government grants. It is suggested that the solution to building good relations between state and school is for the school to be seen as part of the solution to society's ills, not part of the problem; fundamental reform is needed and greatly improved communication. Ten key principles are presented for working effectively with policymakers. Among these principles are the following: (1) willingness to discuss the role of higher education in society; (2) coalition building; (3) building long-term relationships; (4) being prepared to address all relevant issues, even unpleasant ones; (5) better meeting management techniques; and (6) being willing to view things from the policymaker's perspective. (GLR)

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by

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Introduction

State relations must be improved--and can be improved. Far too many of us think only of the campus, and not of the context. When I attend the monthly meetings of the New Jersey Board of Higher Education, I am always struck by the paucity of presidents in attendance. Here it is, the most important forum for higher education in a state which spends about 8% of its $14 billion annual budget on higher education, and perhaps eight of 50 college presidents attend. But New Jersey is not alone in this condition.

Where are the presidents? Perhaps a few caricatures will help us think about the role of the campus CEO in relation to the task of building better state relations.

Four Profiles

I admit from the beginning that caricatures can be unfair and inadequate. But they can also reflect truth and, by forcing comparisons, help illuminate the characteristics we wish to examine.

From my vantage point, I see four presidential portraits, or profiles. While I doubt if any of us can be placed squarely in any one box, and I know that other caricatures can be drawn, I also believe you will recognize these profiles and understand why I mention them in relation to our theme. We give life to at least some of these characteristics some of the time.

Invited keynote address at a CASE national conference entitled "Building Better State Relations," December 4, 1991, Indianapolis.

First, there is the president as "tycoon." This is the president who is always hobnobbing with the corporate elite, more at home in the board room than the classroom, paying more attention to bricks and mortar than to students and faculty, and worried more about bond rates and ratings than about program review.

Second, there is the president as "celebrity." This is the president who identifies with high profile sports teams, highly paid lecturers, big name entertainers, and even heads of state more than with students in the cafeteria or faculty in colloquia.

Third, there is the president as "ward boss." This is the president who stalks the corridors of the statehouse, buttonholes political leaders in the hallway, and attends party fundraisers to be seen by the "high" and the "mighty." This is the president who always has the "scoop" about political personalities and imminent revenue forecasts. He is more likely to be the "buddy" of key staffers than mentor to student leaders.

Fourth, there is the president as "special pleader." This is the president whose campus always has a special request, always needs the exception, never seems to be on the leading edge. This president is more likely to complain than to explain; more likely to see problems than opportunities.

While these are not perfect portraits, they are sketches of people we recognize. Now, let's imagine how state relations are affected by presidents with these personalities and priorities. But first, we must consider why presidents should be concerned with state relations at all.

The Basis for State Relations

Both public and independent institutions, and proprietary schools as well, have statutory, legal, fiscal, political, regulatory, economic, and moral obligations to the state, and, by extension, to local government also. After all, all but one or two of those in the state house are elected from districts, so it is often true that "all politics is local," even at the state level.

When asked about state relations, I am confident most campus presidents would refer to student aid, appropriations, the facilities authority, construction assistance, program approval, the coordinating or governing board, and perhaps even capitation grants and contracts. They may even be aware that state expenditures on higher education increased by 100% between 1977 and 1987. But I wonder if they are aware that state support for independent higher education increased nearly 300% during this same period.

With such significant increases in state support, is it any wonder that Governors, like Virginia's Douglas Wilder, expect colleges and universities to "do their job." And what is the "job" expected of higher education: to change the undergraduate curriculum, to build partnerships with elementary and secondary schools and with business and industry, and to change institutional priorities to give greater attention to teaching, the reform of graduate education, and investments in technology to assist teaching and learning "anywhere"--not just the campus.[1]

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[1] L. Douglas Wilder, "One Governor's Perspective of Higher Education," Educational Record, Fall, 1990, p.42.

Governor Wilder adds to this list by stating an overarching theme. "I expect the system of higher education to act as a system. We cannot be satisfied with a choir of soloists, each singing what it pleases from its own sheet music. ...the whole must act as a system."[2]

Furthermore, he says, "I expect (higher education) to play its roles among the complex array of services provided by the agencies and institutions of state government."[3]

Is Governor Wilder a lone voice expressing such sentiments? No, of course not. As part of a national report on higher education, the staff of the Education Commission of the States wrote:

> We sense a growing frustration--even anger--among many of the nation's governors, state legislators, and major corporate leaders that higher education is seemingly disengaged...the source of problems rather than a part of the solution...[a] failure to lead in the reform of teacher education, questions about faculty workload and productivity and lack of commitment to teaching... The overall sense of many outside of colleges and universities is either that dramatic action will be needed to shake higher education from its internal lethargy and focus, or that the system must be bypassed for other institutional forms and alternatives.[4]

The Sources of Strained Relations

What has led to this conclusion? What have we in higher education done to deserve such comment?

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Education Commission of the States. "Higher Education Agenda." Unpublished report, Denver, Colorado, August 1989.

The answer is complex; the litany is long. Perhaps, as higher education has become more accessible in admissions,it has become more accessible to scrutiny. Perhaps the "ivory tower" helped keep us above prying eyes.

It may also be true that legislators complain about higher education in general even while maintaining supportive relations with their local institution. In this way we are alike. Polls indicate that citizens complain about Congress in general but support their local representative.

Nevertheless, there are reasons for complaint in both quarters.

Think about the grievances filed against higher education in recent years, many of which resulted in the departure of the campus president. Science scandals; athletics scandals; low graduation rates; acquaintance rape; sexual abuse; drug and alcohol abuse; racial and ethnic insensitivity; incivility; denial of free speech; government grants covering yachts and boudoirs; near illiteracy among graduates such that industry spends some $200 million per year on education and training; high school courses required of college freshmen; graduate teaching assistants who can't speak English; faculty who don't teach undergraduates; a rejection of assessment; reductions in faculty and enrollment rather than management and supplies; a reward system out of "sync" with mission statements and priorities; reductions in quality rather than reductions in activities; more concern with 'p.c." than with "p.c.'s"; isolation from school reform; collusion rather than cooperation.

The list is long, yet not complete. It is also not a fair indictment of higher education as a whole. But while all of these pathologies cannot be ascribed to any one institution, and while

many institutions are untouched by most of these issues, the fact remains that there is truth to these statements, and to the ones you can add to this list. These behaviors exist.

Given these complaints, imagine the response of governors and legislators to presidents who fit our stereotypes as "tycoon," "celebrity," "ward boss," and "special pleader." For governors and legislators who believe the complaints and acknowledge the abuses, who read Prof Scam and The Closing of the American Mind, these campus CEO's are not the answer.

I believe the proper role for the campus CEO in state relations, in improving state relations, and in all other institutional relations, is as "educator." We are appointed to be educational leaders; we are expected to be educational leaders, and no one else is expected to fill the role. But if we don't, others will, and then where will we be? As the ECS staff said, if we don't "shake higher education from its lethargy and focus," dramatic action will be needed "or...the system (of higher education) must be bypassed for other institutional forms and alternatives."

The Common Threads of Concern

It is likely that many of the concerns expressed by state leaders and others are already a bit out-of-date. Surely, institutions have been changing their ways; the times have demanded it. And many of the reports of institutional abuse are the result of campus investigations. But the fact remains that there is still truth to these concerns.

There are common threads to these concerns, and the recognition of common elements means we can begin to take corrective action where needed.

One assertion is that higher education institutions lack management controls. The budgets of colleges are designed to spend as much as can be raised. A corollary is that we can add, but we can't subtract.

Another assertion is that we have too little voluntary accountability, and what we have doesn't work. It is said that our voluntary accrediting associations are designed either to ensure that we add more and more resources to professional programs at the expense of the liberal arts, or to ensure that we are committed simultaneously to minimal levels of quality and maximum levels of diversity.

Still another assertion is that we engage in too little cooperation and coordination. Institutions still try to be "all things to all people." Programs must be "invented" and "produced" locally, not in partnership with others.

Another concern is about clarity of purpose. Why do senior public institutions spend millions of scarce dollars on remedial education when mission statements assert a distinctiveness from community colleges? Why do so few institutional leaders take the time to explain "multiculturalism" and why our institutions must prepare our graduates for an increasingly interdependent and multicultural world?

Finally, concern is also expressed about institutional integrity. It is said that our mission statements refer to teaching, but our reward structure belittles it. It is said that our campuses were created to serve society by educating students but we fail to show them respect and our offices are bureaucratic.

How should we respond to these assertions, to these common threads of concern? Some presidents deny them, and of course there are institutions which are exceptions. But that is not the point! The point is that our "system" of higher education exhibits the pathologies identified by these concerns. And those who express these concerns at the state and federal levels provide about 42% of all revenues to public and independent higher education. That's about $50 billion per year, even now.

So, how should we respond for this reason, if for no other? How can we build better state relations, and better institutions in service to society? And how should we respond given today's economic climate, the tremendous competition for state resources, and the prospects for diminished public support in the future?

The Challenges of the 1990's

Campus CEOs across the country are complaining about reductions in state support, the effects of a sluggish economy on fundraising, and the dim prospects for rapid improvement. Some, and I am among them, even go so far as to say that higher education will not see dramatic improvements in public support even when the economy improves, unless we are seen as part of the solution and not part of the problem. Otherwise, we will not see improved support until the crises in health care funding, school reform, and crime are corrected. I want to avoid the creation of self-fulfilling prophecies, but I also want to be realistic and prepared as well.

With good state relations based on trust and mutual understanding, I think our case can be made. But I don't think we'll attain and sustain good state (and corporate and federal) relations until, and unless, we are willing to discuss what we are doing to reform higher education.

Too many of us are telling governors and legislators about the need for reform in elementary and secondary education, health care, and other areas of government. The attempt in these cases is to divert attention from higher education, to say we have been cut enough, and to point to other areas of state investment as sources of savings.

I agree that we need to help state government rethink the principles and methods for supporting these areas. I agree that higher education has received more than its share of cuts. (In New Jersey, for example, funding for senior public institutions has been cut about one-third in two and one-half years.) But I also believe that we in higher education must be prepared to answer some basic questions, and to recognize that governors and legislators face daunting problems--crack babies, falling bridges, AIDS, and crowded jails. They face daunting problems in a period of major change. We must recognize that we, too, are in a period of "sea-change."

The term "sea-change," as used by Shakespeare in literature and ecologists in science, means a radical transformation of something to something else--as in "bones to pearl and coral." Think of the sea-changes being experienced in the newspaper industry. The current "recession" is more than the ebb and flow of the business tides. Advertising revenues at some major newspapers are down almost 50%; auto dealer accounts which spent $40,000 a month now spend $5,000; electronic supply stores which spent $1-2 million a year are now out of business; real estate and classified advertising expenditures are worse than in a very long time. New media are replacing newspapers as the principle vehicle for communication.

Sea-changes are occurring in other areas as well, including the environment and social demographics. We know of these changes. How is it some of us can think that every other institution in society must change radically in response to these forces, but that higher

education can remain as it is? Isn't it our role as presidents--as the chief planners on campus--to interpret these environmental forces and develop the strategies that will guide our institutions around and over these new obstacles? Don't we have to be prepared to answer the questions of those, especially state officials, who ask why we do what we do how we do it, given the resources available and the needs of society?

Now, I know we should beware of the danger of self-fulfilling prophecies; we naturally want to avoid radical change when it may not be needed. And I know we should be aware that "good management" can be "bad politics," with our savings from new efficiencies lost to the state's general fund while inefficient operations which squeal the loudest gain new support.

And, I know that state actions often do not give adequate notice so that institutions can take strategic rather than expedient decisions; across the board cuts are all too common as the state's action and the campus's response.

Nevertheless, I believe we must be ready to answer fundamental questions, whether posed by state leaders or by ourselves as part of our planning exercise. We must be aware of the areas of reform possible and even desired in higher education.

Areas of Reform for Higher Education

We in colleges and universities don't talk much about fundamental reform because it makes us nervous. When asked about improvements in productivity, we are likely to compare the college to a chamber orchestra, and protest the notion of accelerating the pace of performance.

But there are questions we must answer honestly if we are to improve state relations. For example, isn't it true that he who sets graduation requirements influences the number of courses taught and the number of positions required? And isn't it true that those who set the threshold scores for students placing out of remedial courses can actually regulate their own department's enrollments? And isn't it also true that these requirements are usually set without any governing board discussion of institutional mission, strategic plan, comparative advantage, and resource use?

And, furthermore, isn't it true that we in higher education offer far too many courses with far too much specialization? In fact, isn't it true that instead of emphasizing our mission to teach students how to learn on their own, we have expanded the curriculum in an unbridled effort to offer courses on nearly everything that can be known. Yet with all this attention to specialized courses, isn't it true that we tend to leave the lofty "outcomes" goals expressed in our mission statements to be fulfilled by introductory courses taught by part-time faculty? How do we reconcile these practices which, on the one hand, help create a shortage of full-time faculty, and, on the other hand, help create the problem of over-reliance on part-time faculty?

And what do we say to those who ask about faculty who appear on campus only two days a week and hold other professional appointments as therapists, performers, and practitioners? Do we feel confident in justifying these practices?

These are merely some of the practical questions that can be posed by state leaders. Other questions dwell on issues of university participation in school reform, and school-college partnerships; the priority placed on teaching; the success of students in earning the baccalaureate; the forms of scholarship which are valued; the length of time required to earn

the doctorate; the possibility of B.A.- Grad articulation agreements as a companion to AA-BA agreements; the proliferation of student services; the expectations expressed to faculty for teaching, advising, and curriculum improvement; assessment of student learning, especially as related to the goals expressed in the mission statement; the use of telecommunications for teaching and learning and public service, and for monitoring all three; the recruitment of students to math and science; and the degree of cooperation and coordination among institutions.

The number of topics to be questioned are numerous. We can all add to this list quite easily. But that is not the point. The point is not the total of topics, but the fact that college and university presidents must be prepared to address questions on these topics, and address them from state-level as well as campus-level perspectives.

We must also be prepared to discuss the role of higher education in society. College and university presidents are uniquely empowered to express grand dreams for society, and the role of higher education in providing access to opportunities, choice among programs and services, and assistance to those who strive. We must maintain our leadership as the force for individual and social advancement for all citizens, not just those who are virtually assured of success at birth.

After all, we hold commitments to tradition, even as we preserve the past; we hold commitments to community, even as we are concerned with individuals; we hold commitments to raising aspirations, even as we struggle to define what we can know and what we should teach; and we hold commitments to those who are underserved, including those who are forgotten and those who are ignored.

As presidents in pursuit of better state relations, we can use the techniques of politicians, the tools of corporate executives, the contacts of celebrities, and the alarm of special pleaders to advance the support of higher education, especially in pursuit of these goals and the improvement of state relations.

Communications As A Force for Building Better State Relations

The question then is how communications can be employed to help improve state relations. The forms and media of communications are well known. But what about the strategy? I find that the "Ten Key Principles for Effective Work with Policy-Makers" published by the Liaison Group for International Educational Exchange is an effective outline.[5]

The Ten Key principals are as follows:

1. View things from the policy--maker's perspective.
2. Define and move toward common ground.
3. Build your coalition.
4. Never lie.
5. Nurture your sense of timing.
6. Work to build long-term relationships.
7. Cultivate the arts of the fifteen-minute meeting and the one-page briefing paper.
8. Do your homework.
9. Involve policy-makers in your activities.
10. Some animals are more equal than others.

[5] "Advocacy and the International Educator," The Liaison Group, Washington, D.C. 20006.

Conclusion

Perhaps with honesty about fundamental issues and questions, and with a strong sense of strategy in communicating with state leaders, a new picture of the campus CEO will emerge. Perhaps he or she can be known as an educator who is willing to think fundamentally about the higher education enterprise; as one who has the ability to employ the skills of the municipal official, the corporate executive, and the impresario to raise student aspirations and serve society; and as one who is committed to ensuring that a college education is the best that it can be. Perhaps then we will show how to build better state relations because we will be doing the job we were asked to do.

Thank you.